

Adrian Perez, EJ Coordinator

Representatives of the Karuk Tribe attended the Cal/EPA Workshop on the Environmental Justice Action Plan. This letter is to further iterate statements made on behalf of the Tribe regarding pilot project criteria.

The Karuk Tribe ancestral territory lies in the middle-Klamath watershed along the Klamath River below Iron Gate Dam and above the confluence of the Trinity and Klamath Rivers. The Tribe is federally recognized but lacks a reservation, water rights, and fishing rights. The Tribe holds the rights to small land holdings in federal Trust. The Tribe does not have a casino and is therefore wholly dependent on grants for support and maintenance of its environmental protection programs. The Tribe consists of approximately 3000 recognized members of whom over 60% live in poverty. The social ills that often accompany poverty and culturally destruction, alcoholism, diabetes, imprisonment, and heart disease are rampant among Tribal members.

The Karuk people live downstream of 5 hydroelectric facilities on the Klamath and receive none of the power generated by the dams. Further, the dams allow for no fish passage and effectively deny Tribal Trust species such as salmon and lamprey, access to over 300 miles of the River. The socio-economic impacts to the Tribe and the community-at-large are dire. The dams further have been shown to detrimentally affect water quality conditions in the River and impede Tribal members from practicing their religious ceremonies. The massive agricultural projects in the upper basin release toxic pesticides, herbicides and heavy metals into the river system in addition to massive nutrient loading. Many of these lipophilic toxic compounds such as mercury and chlorinated hydrocarbons bio-magnify up the food chain and are concentrated in the bodies of Tribal members and most importantly in the milk of lactating mothers. Tribal children are at great risk due to their sensitive developmental stage and the transfer of these compounds through nursing.

Mercury was used extensively on the Klamath and its tributaries wherever gold mining was practiced. Mercury was used to bind with the gold and then could be easily removed later. Some accounts of early gold miners speak of using as much as 50 gallons of mercury in a month. Mercury is extremely persistent in the environment and is rapidly converted to an organic, lipophilic form, methyl-mercury.

I have sent a similar letter to Tam Doduc and included a study that examines the health consequences also associated with a Tribal diet that has been shifted from traditional foods.

Thank you for your consideration,

Jim Henderson
Water Quality Coordinator
Karuk Tribe of CA

